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The Fourth Watch



ROY IVAN JOHNSON



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THE FOURTH WATCH



THE FOURTH WATCH

A Book of Poems

ROY IVAN JOHNSON .



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To
L. M. S. J.



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THE FOURTH WATCH



RECONSTRUCTION

Slow dawn
Comes on:
Cloud-strewn
It creeps along the east—
Cloud-strewn,
Or trailing hearsèd hopes,
It gropes
Its way,
Dull gray,
Across an eastern dune.

Cold dawn
Comes on:
Ice-hued,
Its fingers touch the sky;
Ice-hued,
It chills the naked beach
And lays its hand
Upon the hills that stand
Like earth's breasts round and nude.

Gray dawn
Comes on:
Can Day
Go clad in monkish gray?

THE FOURTH WATCH

Can Day,
That boasts a warming sun,
Have spun
Out of the light
Of a storm-riven night
A cloak of gray
And dun?

Slow, cold, and gray,
The dawn
Comes on:
Earth, drugged with hope against the cold,
Awaits the turn of the gray to gold.
The same sun rides beyond the mist;
Already the lips of the east are kissed:
The dawn
Comes on—
 Slow
 Cold
 And gray
But Dawn!

THE FOURTH WATCH

The moon hangs o'er the river
Like a silk-and-silver flame;
And the breathing willows quiver
With a fear they cannot name.

Like a steel-cold sabre lying
Along the valley wide,
Dropped by the red-star, flying
In the walls of day to hide,

Is the sluggish, sliding river
Against the valley's breast,
While Earth, the Mother-giver,
Rocks the night to rest.

No red-beamed star ascendant
In the waiting hours of morn!
But peace, like a shining pendant,
Doth the throat of the Dawn adorn.

THANKSGIVING AFTER WAR

Men whose strength has felt the strain of war's demands,
Men who did the nation's work with willing hands,
Men of every race, of every creed, of all the lands,
 Thank God for Peace!

Women, you whose steadfast hearts a nation cheers,
You who steeped your souls in prayer—but not in tears,
You who hid with smiles of courage all your fears,
 Thank God for Peace!

Children, you who felt the hand and heel of war,
Children of the nations, you who will not mar
That dawn which breaks across the world with hope-
 filled star,
 Thank God for Peace!

THE WOUNDS

On France the sunlight falls again
 With healing glow,—
But scars of Flanders seam her heart
 With hidden woe.

From windows stream the flags of peace
 And victory,—
But Sorrow sits beside the roads
 Of Picardy.

A nation shouts for joy,—but oh,
 The bleeding pain
That lies along the ruined fields
 Of fair Champagne!

THE ROAD OF NIGHT

Life travels the road of night where Grief,
Grim-cowled in gray,
Like a ghost on the tomb of a lost belief,
Stands in the way.

Over the world and the soul of things,
Prone and stark,
Stretching its shadow-dropping wings,
Hovers the dark.

Dawn lifts her head from the shoulder of night:
Sorrow is past.
There in the path of life, a light
Trembles at last!

THE ALTAR OF SOUL

Oh, I am the priest at the Altar of Soul!
And the life-spun curtains drawn
About my heart swing slowly apart
For the birth of each new dawn.

And brightens the fire on the Altar of Soul
As the new light enters in,
The fast-burning fire of worthy desire
Consuming the fruitage of sin.

In my heart as I stand by the Altar of Soul,
Athrill with a vision new,
Is enkindled a spark that shall glow in the dark
When the curtains of life swing to.

Yes, I am the priest at the Altar of Soul
By life's time-old decree,—
And the fires that I light shall keep it as bright
As when it was given to me.

THE SECRET DOOR

All the sighs of silent strife,
All the deepest thoughts of life,
All the far-off goals of hope
Toward which the spirit dared to grope,
Fancies fair and manifold,
And all the dreams that went untold
Are secret-locked and set apart
Within the chambers of the heart.

Light of visions still unborn,
Light of future-dawning morn,
Things the secret soul doth own
But dare confess to God alone,
All the hard world never knew,
Seeds of hope that never grew,
Ages hence shall flash and start
From the ashes of the heart.

From out the chambers of the soul—
God's refining furnace bowl—
Shall one day pour the store of gold
For which the world its palm doth hold.
And though your soul may be the first
In which the vision splendid burst,
It may be it began to glow
In hearts an age or more ago.

THE FOURTH WATCH

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So tread the path with feet unshod
Nor seek to sound the wells of God,
For in an age of iron and stone
Seeds for an age of love were sown.
And treasure well that hidden ore
Behind that smooth unpaneled door,
Until, refined, the gold shall start
From the smelting furnace of the heart.

THE REFUGE OF DREAMS

In my heart I heard a whisper
Like the sigh of a star at dawn,
Like the stir of a leaf in autumn
When the chill of the night comes on—
A whisper that said, "O whither
Have the bright-winged fancies fled
That homed with thy soul in April
When Beauty and Youth were wed?"

And I answered, "The star that is paling
Will abide in the deeps of the sky,
And the leaf quiver downward in autumn
In the bosom of earth to lie,
For the star must go out at the dawning
And the leaf must make way for the frost,
But we know in our hearts that neither
The star nor the leaf is lost:

"The star will come forth in the evening;
The leaf will return with the spring:
And I shall discover the refuge
Of my dreams that have taken wing,
When the gates of the dusk are closing
And my soul with song is rife,
When the light of a nearer Heaven
Has melted the snow of life."

THE HARBOR OF THE HEART

O the ships that sail from out
The harbor of the heart
To horizon lines of doubt
With hope their only chart!

Ships in search of treasure hoards
Adventure on the main:
Not the wealth that earth affords
Can bring them back again.

Ships there are whose star of power
Ascendant in the sky
Tempts ambition, in the flower,
A daring cruise to try.

O the thousand, thousand ships
For honor, gold, or gain
The heart sends out to greet the lips
Of Fortune on the main!

But safe within a sheltered cove
Beside the circling shore
Where enemy shall never rove
Or pirate strike an oar,

THE FOURTH WATCH

Lies the bark of rarest worth,
Cherished by the heart
More than all the stores of earth,
Waiting to depart,—

Waiting till some promised star
Shall in the sky abide,
To sail across the harbor bar
Outward with the tide.

Compassless, but heaven-starred,
The ships of love go out,—
A hope to guide, a prayer to guard,
A God-speed parting shout.

Whate'er the course the love-ships take,
To cold or torrid zone,
Whate'er the ports the love-ships make,
They go to seek their own.

Ships come in and ships depart,
But laden love-ships found
Within the harbor of the heart
Are always OUTWARD BOUND.

THEIR GIFTS

Their lives they wrought into steel and iron;
Their souls in the mould they cast;
And it ribbons the prairies of the West
And bridges chasms vast:
For their lives were the lives of engineers
Who the pulse of progress feel,
And whose spirits live in the gifts they give
And in dreams that outlast the steel.

I had a friend (as you have had)
And the thoughts that my friend instilled
In the deeps of my heart in our days of love
Are thoughts that can never be killed;
When forgotten his tomb and unhonored his bones
And his name is a memory dim,
He shall start from his grave in the love that he gave,
For that was the essence of him.

A poet framed his thought in words;
And the years, on the gallery wall
Of the Temple of Art, shall treasure the gift
Long after the funeral pall
Has enwrapped the clay that housed his soul;
And his beauty-fed spirit shall lift

An offering to Time in the thought-cups of rhyme
And the poet shall live in his gift.

Whether Song, or Love, or Steel be our dream,
If we pour this clay-cup dry
In our matrix of deeds, a star shall be cast—
A star to be set in the sky—
And its light shall be fed by the oil of our souls
Exhaustless as ether; and we,
In the glow of the star, shall outgrow what we are
And conquer mortality.

LURES

Across my pilgrim path one day
A gladsome golden shower
Of transient sunlight came to play
And while away the hour.

“Oh, stay!” my soul in gladness cried,
“So far thy feet have trod!”—
A Voice in low reproach replied:
“And make the world thy god?”

MY SOUL

What is my soul? The sages say
A thousand different things:
I know it came by the rainbow-way
Flashing its rainbow wings.

What is my soul? I can not know
All of the essence of me:
I merely feel the currents flow
In from a tideless sea.

What is my soul? Perhaps a song
When the galaxies were young
That the earth-star caught from an angel
throng
When the praise of God was sung.

What is my soul? Immortal Youth
Swayed by a magic rod:
An atom in the sphere of truth
That tips the wand of God.

THE ORBIT OF DESIRE

Across the waves of may-be
My swift desires flee:
They tread with magic sandals
Imagination's sea.

What need of ships to carry?
What need of chart or sign?
What need of log and compass?
Of latitude or line?

They travel God-directed;
No resting place they know
Save that from which they travel,
The port from which they go.

But o'er the waves of may-be
The distant siren sings:
Away again they wander,
On venture-seeking wings,

Till all the soul's horizon
Is touched with magic fire
And round the seas of fancy
Flames the orbit of desire.

MOON TRYST

The moon came out of the east
Trailing her silver gown
Through the dust of dawn-stained clouds
Violet-gray and brown.

Her blush was as deep as the rose
In the sun-kissed cheeks of May—
Could it be that the morning star
Looked in on her tryst with day?

MY STARS

An angel slept beneath my roses
And breathed her beauty's spell:
An angel slept beneath my roses
The night the petals fell.

Snowy-white upon her tresses
They slowly settled down
And lay like soft and clinging kisses
—A rose-spun velvet crown!

She woke to meet the smile of Morning
And left my garden bare—
But the saintly sweetness of the roses
Is still upon the air.

She passed through mystic glow and gloaming
And was crowned with a crown of light:
Across the floor of heaven drifted
The gleaming petals white.

So now the sky with soul-strewn roses
All beautified I see,
For since an angel blessed my garden
The white stars shine for me.

DUSK-WINDS

Softly the night winds pass
That trail in the wake of day
And breathe to the shadowy grass
Still Evening's lay.

Dusk-things quiver and pant
In the hush of twilight dim,
Athrill at the vibrant chant
Of the vesper hymn.

Dreamily, quietly drops
The bodiless form of the breeze
Through the murmuring, swaying tops
Of worshipping trees.

Down in the valley deep
The willows, weeping, bend,
And, sighing, are soothed to sleep
On the breast of the wind.

Benedictions rest
On dusk-red roses fair
With perfumed lips caressed
By the ghosts of air.

Deepens the dusk and pales
The last faint western ray,
As the whispering night wind trails
In the wake of day.

CLOUD FANTASIES

Wonder-eyed I view
The moving, melting mass
As across a field of blue
The cloud-creations pass;
Cloud-shapes form and fade
And throng in changing crowds:
My mammoth, miracle-made
Menagerie of clouds.

Over the rim of the sky,
With wings spread out and out
Great white eagles fly,
And their pinions curve about,
Till the soaring cloud-shape breaks
And slowly drifts in two,
And one a camel makes
And one a kangaroo.

But ere one wonder's born
The masses change again:
The camel boasts a horn,
The kangaroo a fin.
Then tigers, horses, whales,
Come floating on apace;
As one creation pales
Another takes its place.

Across the circus ring
Of the zephyr-dusted sky
In proud parade they swing—
Those cloud-shapes—while I lie
In showers of summer shade
A-hiding from the sun,
And watch the cloud-parade
And count them one by one.

At early morn or night
You see the prison bars,
Like golden ribs of light,
Through which the sun and stars
Peer, wonder-bound, to see
On fields of trodden blue
My cloud menagerie,
My sky-imprisoned zoo.

DUSK AND DAWN

A crimson flow in the western sky
From the death-wound of the day
And shafts of light like sword-blades bright
Thrust fiercely through by the hand of night,
As slow on the low horizon gray
The day sinks down to die!

But the grave-pit made for the dying day
When the pall of the dusk came down
And over the prostrate evening lay,
Contains not always its vanquished prey:
Though, grim, for a time the night holds sway,
New time shall the eastern morning crown
With dawn's reviving ray.

So sinks the soul through the night of doubt
When the light of a flaming sun
Withers the nested creeds of our heart,
When the dusk-winds blow from an unknown mart
And hurricane-tumble our theories apart,
When the day of dull credence is darkened and done
And the light of tradition gone out.

And so wanes the night when the day is gone
In the heart-sore, hungry soul.
Though the ether of doubt dull the sense of the mind,
Though the wings of the spirit the fear-shadows bind,
That sun-seeking atom of lost human kind
Shall discover an East where, marking the goal,
Truth flames in renascent dawn.

A WALK IN THE SPRING RAIN

It rains; and the world is living:
Nature is buoyant and strong:
Like the thrill that is felt from giving,
Or the throb of a soul-glowing song,
Is the joy-fraught flood that rushes
Into each thirsting vein
And mantles my cheek in blushes
Soft-kissed by the cooling rain.

To walk in the vernal shower
Through the water-wet weeds of the mead,
That are left from last year's dower
To cover the waiting seed—
To feel in my face the renewing
Of the patter of pouring rain
Is joy of Nature's brewing.
It is pleasure purged of pain.

With wide-open arms my spirit
Embraces life's joys anew
And drinks of the happiness near it
Like a bee of its honey-dew.
The coolness of raindrops clinging
Conquers the thoughts of strife
And a Voice in my heart is singing,
"You—you are the Raindrop of Life."

A SONG OF THE ROAD

I'm the royal tramp of springtime,
And to boast I've ample reason,
For it's springtime, wingtime, kingtime:
It's the migratory season.

I'm the care-free king of the gravel,
For the world is at my feet;
Come travel the ways I travel,
And feel earth's pulses beat.

In the moonlit noon of a June night
I glean my hoard of riches
From a silver mine of moonlight
Thronged by a thousand witches.

I am one with the wind and weather:
In this college of Stars-and-Dew
The fee I pay is the leather
I wear from the sole of my shoe.

I am king of the growing season,
My palace, the world I roam;
And work is the only treason,
A road my only home.

I'm the royal tramp of springtime,
And to roam I've ample reason:
It's Nature's wandering-wing time,
Her migratory season.

ROMANTIC YOUTH

Living through the wear of winters,
Dancing daily in our dreams,
Like the sunlight soft and silent
Silvering the sluggish streams,
Is the fairy touch of fancy
Folded in a maiden's hair,
And the picture left unpainted
Of the fairest of the fair.

'Tis the glint of raven blackness
Or the sunlit hair of gold,
That revives the glow romantic
Of a story never told;
While the dreamy blue of heaven,
Or the black of midnight skies
Starts the ghost of recollection
Where our morning fancy lies.

O the romance of our morning,
When our learning fancies rove
And the spirit seeks its kindred,
Yielding to the touch of love!
Then, perhaps, a voice in tremor,
In the days when hearts are young,
Sets athrill the chords of music
That shall ever be unsung.

THE FOURTH WATCH

Though the picture be unpainted,
 Never can the colors fade;
Though the tale was unrelated,
 Something of the story stayed;
And the song unsung is singing
 Of a maiden, more than fair,
Who, to shrive our souls and save us,
 Set the star of Beauty there.

THE MEMORY OF A NIGHT IN YOUTH

The night bird uttered a far-off cry
And the sound sank down through the forest bare;
O'er the towering tops of the listening trees
It melted away in the vibrant air;
And the spreading darkness, deep and still,
Seemed all at once the more intense,
While the quivering starlight over the hill
Was the breath of a new and a strange incense.

By the side of the wood ran a little brook,
And the tall grass stood in a happy dream
As (listening soft to the brooklet's laugh)
It was kissed to sleep by the amorous stream.
The fragrant meadow, wide and still,
To the lightest touch of the night-air bent,
And, whispering low, its secrets told
To the wooing breeze as it came and went.

Its secrets were told to the evening air,
Caressingly breathed to the listening tree,
And Nature, willing her secrets to share,
Whispered them softly again to me.
And the trees' tall tops against the sky
(The white stars jeweled their limbs with light)
Stretched up like organ pipes, awry,
For the soft-breathed symphony of Night.

THE MOTH-MAN

Along the crimson pleasure path he took his way;
And through the fatal fields of death his journey lay,
Where mouldering heaps of corpses cold—corrupted
clay—

Reveal on faces deadly wan the crimson ray.

On every side the fallen lie! The dying groans
Unto the traveler's ears are borne—and muffled moans
Of wretched pilgrims perishing. Instead of stones
To mark the crimson course are piles of bleaching bones.

But just ahead are gleaming lights, like scarlet wines,
That tempt the traveler where the Bauble brightest
shines,

And draw him like a filing in the magnet's lines
Of force,—in spite of counsel wise, or warning signs.

From brain to brainless after all is but a span,
And passion runs today where eons since it ran.
The dull, unbrained moth has, since the world began,
Its own destruction wrought in flame—and so has man.

BLIGHT

The flower that feels upon it
The frost where the dew has been
Has a chill in its heart forever
And is never the same again.

The page, when its ivory whiteness
Has been marred by the stroke of a pen
With a stain that will cling forever,
Can ne'er be the same again.

And a soul, though as pure as the starlight,
If dimmed by the shadow of sin,
May forfeit its lustre forever
And be never the same again.

FRANCIS JOSEPH

“I am tired” were the emperor’s last words. . . .
In his hands he held the silver and pearl
Rosary. . . . There was a leaden sky.
—*Vienna News Dispatch.*

“I am tired:
The weight of empire bears my shoulders down;
The throne, the robe, the sceptre, and the crown
Become a cross,
Borne willingly, but wearily:
And I am tired.

“Austria,
Three score and eight my years of empire are;
And through those years thy name hath been my star,
Thy grief my tears,
Thy wounds the wounds of me,
O Austria!

“Weary years,
And prayers, and toils, that end in empire’s woe!
Is this the goal toward which all nations grow?
With many fears
I view the leaden sky and mourn
My weary years.

“Not in vain,—
Not all in vain the pearl and silver beads,
Not wholly lost my love-inspired deeds;
Though battle frown
And hide the sunset glory now,—
’Tis not in vain.

“I am tired:
My eyes are tired of seeing—tired of sight;
My soul is tired of sceptres—tired of might.
Death lifts the crown:
I close my eyes—to rest—to rest,
For I am tired.”

THE KINGLY WAY

(Suggested by the foreword of Chapter II in "The Quest of Happiness," by Newell Dwight Hillis.)

The king in troubled dreams one night
And worn with restlessness
Held converse with the Angel bright
Of Pleasure and Success.

"I'll bring rich gifts unto thy son,"
The smiling angel said,
"And ere his princely race is run
Success shall crown his head."

The king, whose reign was good and kind,
One question much did brood:
'Twas for the prince he bore in mind
Such deep solicitude.

"A goodly son," he told himself;
Though so he was indeed,
The king had fears lest royal pelf
Should turn his thoughts to greed.

For when from monarchs' minds and hearts
The sense of duty strays,
No pomp that selfishness imparts
Can win a people's praise.

And so in fear the king had said,
"A goodly son he seems,"
And tossing, troubled, on his bed,
He dreamed these two strange dreams:

Unto the king the angel told
Her promise in his sleep:
"Give me thy son and earth shall hold
No cause to make him weep.

"In him Success her king shall meet,
And I will crush him wine
From purple vines of pleasure sweet
That o'er his door shall twine.

"The path he treads with me shall be
A kingly path indeed,
A path where he shall never see
The shadow of a need.

"While friends unnumbered bow the knee
And shout his princely fame,
Shall every martial foeman flee
And tremble at his name.

“Their fruits shall wealth and fame combine,
And mine shall be the deed
His stately coffers deep to line
With glory’s golden meed.

“To him shall courts of ease belong
Through which shall hourly ring
The sweetest strains of Pleasure’s song.
Give me thy son, O King!”

The angel spoke her promise fair;
The monarch’s brow was clear:
If Fortune’s robes the prince should wear,
What further need of fear?

Of glory, honor, fame, success,
Did not the angel speak?
If these his princely lot should bless,
What more remained to seek?

If Pleasure and Success would guide
The prince upon his way,
And no ill fortune could abide
The issue of a day,

’Twere well her presence to invoke
And prove her promise true—
But ere reply he made he woke—
Then slept to dream anew.

But like a wizard's magic ring
 Our visions mould and melt:
 And now in tears before the king,
 The Angel, Sorrow, knelt.

In sombre robes and simply wrought,
 With modest head inclined,
 She rose and stood like one who sought
 The Peri's boon to find.

"I, too, an angel am, O King."
 She raised her tender eyes.
 "Give me thy son and I shall bring
 Him truth instead of lies."

Through tears a smile of kindness gleamed
 Like Eden in her face;
 And the monarch muttered, as he dreamed,
 A half-forgotten grace.

"Vain Pleasure offers wealth and fame:
 To live by such as these
 Is making selfishness your aim
 And idleness your ease.

"Where Pleasure promises success,
 I promise patient toil—
 For humble labors always bless,
 While riches often soil.

“I’ll touch his heart with bitter pains
And give him tears to shed;
I’ll turn to dross the gold he gains
And make him want for bread.

“Yea, more than this the prince shall learn,
Ere I my task have done:
His dearest friends to foes I’ll turn—
Because I *love* thy son.

“Affliction’s wine for him shall flow:
The prince must sorrow share,
That he another’s grief may know,
Another’s burden bear.

“Let not ambition deign to think
No starless nights to know:
The kings of men are those who drink
Another’s cup of woe.

“Then give thy son, O King, to me,
For I am Sorrow’s sprite;
A burden-bearer he shall be
The people’s wrongs to right.”

The king spoke out: “The truth you say
Is truth of God above;
Teach thou my son the *kingly way*
To win a people’s love.”

“HOMEWARD BOUND”

From smiling, nodding wayside flower,
Or beating rhythm of the shower,
The racing pulse imbibes new power
And shouts the fast approaching hour
When you'll be “Homeward bound!”

The hills and valleys talk to you;
Invoke the sky of gray or blue;
Consult the stars, the dusk, the dew:
They all in unison renew
The chant of “Homeward bound!”

“Homeward, homeward, homeward bound!”
Nowhere else such joy is found
That binds the beating heart around
As that when fancy forms the sound,
“Homeward, homeward bound!”

HOME FROM THE CITY STREETS

I hear all day the thud of feet
That walk the busy city street
And carry surging through the heat
A human tide.

Those stately buildings, Argus-eyed,
Watch above the surging tide
And line that course of commerce wide,—
The city street.

I feel the great world's pulses beat
As traffic rolls from street to street;
I feel the truth, the rank deceit,
And all the wrong

That moves within that human throng
Which goes with eager steps along
And kills the weak to crown the strong
With praise unmeet.

Here thousands may with thousands meet,
Nor one of all the number greet:
Alone and in myself complete,
I go my way.

When evening marks the close of day,
How sweet to take the homeward way
While whirring car-wheels faintly play
 My homing dreams!

And every field that fleeting gleams
A new-born breath of nature seems
And nearer marks my land of dreams—
 The Land of Home.

'Tis part of life to cease to roam;
'Tis healing for the heart to come
Back from the strife and struggle, home—
 Home from the city streets.

THREE LIGHTS

Out of my window I look and sigh,
When the twilight shadows glow,
Watching the lights of the night so nigh
That burn in the town below,—

Watching the glimmering glow of the lights,
Like spear points glancing down
Against the sable college heights
That rise beyond the town.

And look! Like triple starbeams bright,
Where the sky-dark shadows flow,
Against the blackened scroll of night
Three Lights— that gleam in a row!

Lights—three lights that gleam in a row
From the hilltop's lonely crest,
Like stars of love through the dusk of woe
Or memories, soul-caressed.

Three! and together—shining—bright!
Redeeming the evening gloam!
My heart, like the night, shall be flooded
with light
When Sweetheart and Baby are home.

BABY WISDOM

Baby dear, tell me true:
Would you laugh and kick and coo,
Would you dimple as you do
 If you knew
What the world we've brought you to
Would in its turn bring to you?
 Would you—if you knew,
 Baby dear?

In your baby eyes of blue
 Thousand fairy fancies throng,
Fancies old as they are new,
Fancies strange but fancies true,
 That to babyhood belong.

Maybe ghosts of bygone dreams
 Hover in those mystic springs
Where the life-light softly gleams
Like a drop from Lethean streams
 Ere forgetfulness it brings.

In your baby eyes of blue
 Age-old mists and shadows glow,
Shrouding deep that wisdom true,
Wisdom old as it is new,
 Like the rosebuds ere they blow.

THE FOURTH WATCH

Baby dear, whisper low
While you laugh and dimple so:
Tell me if you truly know
 All the woe
That may meet you as you go
Through this world of shine and snow.
 Do you—do you know,
 Baby dear?

IF I WERE A FLOWER

I

Purple

If I were a flower, the purple of power
My chosen hue should be,
And, though tiny and small, I should publish to all
My floral majesty,

That people might know as they go to and fro
In search of the thing of worth
That the power of the great is of humble estate
And springs from the bosom of earth.

I should joy to know that, in purple aglow,
The hearts of men I should probe
With a thought that would bide long after had died
The hues of my royal robe.

II

White

If the dust of the tomb should climb into bloom
After mouldering ages of night,
The petals, I hope, o'er my grave, when they ope,
May be spotless—and stainlessly white.

Whate'er it may be that shall bloom over me—
Whether violet, lily, or rose—
Through purity's eye I shall smile at the sky
When the tender, white petals uncloze.

And of purity sweet the truth I'll repeat
Each day to the passer-by
As, with consummate grace, I stand, with my face
Turned up to the laughing sky.

III

Gold

If I were a flower, I should choose me a dower
From the gold of the sundown's blaze
And bathe all my buds in the shining fire-floods
Of the noonday's molten rays.

Then to those who behold my garment of gold
Should this lesson of life be taught:
That the thing of most worth in this treasure-mad earth
Is a treasure that cannot be bought.

For my gold-circled eyes that look up to the skies
Drew their wealth from the golden sun:
And Heaven lets fall her treasure on all
Who look upward when labor is done.

IV

Blue

Sweet flower by the way, I should earnestly pray
 (If I could change places with you)
That the sky might descend and over me bend
 And paint me a beautiful blue.

And then I should say, as I smiled by the way,
 To all of the passers-by :
“I have nothing to fear in dwelling down here,
 For my heart has been touched by the sky.

“And so, in the span of the life of a man,
 In meeting the problem of sin,
There’s never a harm that can give you alarm
 If you and the heavens are kin.”

LOVE'S MEMORY

I dreamed that I held in my hand
A flower of brilliant hue,
And I watched its petals expand
Beautiful, strange, and new.

It stood for a moment, displayed
Like a queen in her rich array,
When its petals began to fade
And slowly to drop away.

The withering stem was then
Of its beauty quite bereft,
And at last where the flower had been
But an atom of dust was left.

But hanging upon the air,
When the flower had faded and gone,
Was a perfume sweet and rare
That thrilled like the breath of dawn.

DREAM-SONG

Every drop of morning dew
Is Nature's magic art
And shrines for every lover true
The mistress of his heart.

Noonday's brightest skies of blue
That arch the heavens above
Are pale beside the gorgeous hue
Of rainbow skies of love.

Every sunset flashing through,
The thoughts of you arise,
And silent night but brings to view
The stars that light your eyes.

Morning, noon, and night renew
Love's dreams of joy—unknown:
My dreams of life are dreams of you—
Dreams, but dreams alone!

THE SONG OF THE AVERAGE MAN

I sing not the hymn of the plutocrat
Nor drone the chant of the slave;
I do not recite any ballad of might
Nor the battle-song of the brave;
I sing not the ways of the One Great One—
Let sages interpret, who can,
The voice of the Lord. Be it mine to record
The song of the average man:

“I hear you have called me the king of the earth—
A kingship established of old—
But I very well see that my royalty
Has been stripped of its purple and gold.
So the dignified title but adds to my woe
And serves my discomfort to fan:
Can a meaningless name, a spectre-like flame,
Cheer the lot of the average man?

“A spectre-like flame! By its light I can see
Myself as the spectre-king:
My torn, faded robe is the garment of Job,
The mantle of suffering!
For my kingdom is woe, and sorrow, and pain—
'Tis a part of the Infinite Plan—
So behold, all alone, on an ash-heap throne,
His Highness, The Average Man!

“My burdens I bear and my kingship is sure.
My theories of life are concrete:
If I but give heed to my imminent need,
My circle of life is complete.
What dealings have I with the Doctrines of Things?
New theories I scruple to scan.
So onward I plod toward a parent-proved God,
For—I am the average man.”

THE SPIRIT OF MUSIC

Oh, I am the Spirit of Music,
The child of the swinging spheres!
I was bathed in the light of a vision
Encircling the cradle of years.
My wings are of downy feather,
They were smoothed by the Angel of Dreams
As I slept by the pools of pleasure
That are fed by the Lethean streams.

I garnered the sweeping lashes
I wear from an errant star,
And the glances that gleam from beneath them
The shining Apollo's are,
For I came through the dome of the heavens
Ere my journey to earth was run
And into the heart of my being
Came the magnetic force of the sun.

Yes, I am the Spirit of Music;
I throb with the pulse of the world;
I dwell on the mountains of morning,
Or in palaces lachryma-pearled.
I am old as the tottering ages,
Eternal as star and sun,
And my voice shall bring order from chaos
When the march of the planets is done.

THE STORM-KING

Out of the regions of nowhere,
Out of the caves of storm,
Glides with the speed of a spectre
A fast-flying, phantom-like form;
Mounting the steeds of the whirlwind,
And pointing the hurricane's lance,
He races abreast with the tempest
Or spins the tornado dance.

O the wreckage wrought by the Storm-king!
He moves in a thousand shapes:
He whirls the sands of the desert,
Or tumbles the sea at the capes—
For the phantom-like form of the Storm-king
May one or a million be,
And the hosts that sweep the mainland
Are the same that lash the sea.

Over the fields of winter
The Storm-king's spectres fare,
And the traveler turns in terror
At the touch of their barbèd hair;
And the blasts that are breathed from the nostrils
Of the Storm-king's steeds as they pass
Cut keen as the blades of battle
Or pierce like the points of glass.

Over the summer harvest
Hastens the heralding wind
And the giant boughs of the forest
Like flame before it bend;
And the cloud-imprisoned thunder
That sits in the Storm-king's hand
Is lost in the rush of the torrent
That drenches a thirsting land.

Forth to the regions of nowhere
Passes the phantom form,
Fanning the face of the tempest,
Bulging the cheeks of the storm,
Till across the dome of the heavens
Is beaten the iris path
And the Storm-king gallops under
The arch of his passing wrath.

SKY-PICTURES

Star-gathering Morn
To whose rich vestments cling
The flaming fingers of the day
Is here,
And, as from hidden mere
Of trembling, liquid light,
Doth leap to sight
Of the watching eye,
An elf-like sprite,
In roses dight
Dripping with crimson dew,—
So, forth from the brightening eyes of Morn,
Athwart the star-bare sky
In whose far corners lie
Night's waning ghosts of gray,
Flash the dancing fire-sprites of the day
Wrapped in rosebud hue,
And blush the paling shadows, torn,
Into beds of gold and blue.

But more than Morn, in truth,
I saw in the sky of the young, new day:
I beheld glad, glorious, gay,
Star-gathering youth.

The zenith hour,
Before whose glare the shadows crouch,
Has come. Day rules at heaven's height
Upon his azure couch
Of burnished steel;
And fields and flowers feel
The fierce, compelling might
Of the impassioned King of Light,
Whose warm, intense caresses burn
The upturned lips of Earth,
And Earth's responding children turn
To the source of their sun-filled mirth.

But more than the zenith hour
I read in the blazing noonday sky:
Manhood's might, mature—and I sigh
For full-blown power.

Star-crownèd eve,
From whose soft dusk the shadows weave
A purple robe of majesty
And drape it fold on fold
About the dying day,
Sits in the western sky
Upon a sunset throne of gold,—
King of the riches there that lie
In the palace of Day, grown old,—
Riches of wisdom garnered from Time,

THE FOURTH WATCH

61

Riches of sundown's glory sublime,
Riches that never die,
That live again in the star-hung sky,
The crown of the even-time.

And gracing the vanishing page
Of day with sunset colors rife,
Lo! Throned on the riches of life,
Star-crownèd age!

THE CONQUEST OF THE SEA

The waters of earth, how mighty and great,
That lie earth's sea-beds in
And rage with the winds, or when tempests abate
Lie calm in the deeps that isolate
The wave-washed homes of men!

On the heaving breast of ocean wide
The rocking billows sleep
Till out of the wastes where the storms abide
In the track of the fearless tempest ride
The raging powers of the deep.

And many a fearful deed hath been
By the sea king's mighty host
In ravage wrought on the sons of men
Who braved the roaring tempest's din
With futile and fatal boast.

O the dream of conquest-loving man
Is a dream of victory!
Since first the dawn of days began
His daring dream has been to span
The watery gap of the sea.

To master, to conquer, command, subdue,
To gain imperial sway
Is the spring of our dreams and the deeds we do,
Is the secret of life that the poets knew
And the bards of the olden day.

When first in hollowed trunk did float
(Or hulk of bounden staves)
A half-clad man whose savage throat
Proclaimed his new dug-out a boat,
'Twas a victory o'er the waves.

And then his seaward course to bend
He taught himself to form
The huge ship-mast whose sail-hung end
Caught up and harnessed the very wind
That lashed the sea to storm.

But now the Titan vessels rich,
With steel-plate, armored side,
Round which the foam-capped billows pitch,
Convert the element in which
They, sea-defying, ride

To mighty motor power that drives
The coursing, countless scores
Of ocean-daring human hives
Thronged with the freight of a thousand lives
Ship-bound for distant shores.

So the mind of man and the strength of steam
Have blazed an ocean path.
But that was never the end of the dream:
There were sea-drowned lands in the north to redeem
From the ravaging ocean's wrath.

The dream of dominion is never complete:
Like a will-o'-the-wisp, its gleam,
Forever advancing, outraces the feet;
Although the deed and the dream never meet,
There is joy in pursuit of the dream.

The countless wrecks upon the deep,
The sea-god's angry deed,
Lay fathom-locked in watery sleep,
And the arms of ocean strove to keep
Her stolen fruits of greed.

But the armored diver sounds the main,
And ocean's treasury
Conceals her hidden stores in vain,—
And in the deeps doth man remain
The master of the sea.

At last across the basin wide,
Drawn through the slime and mire,
Beneath the moon-enamoured tide,
Through phosphorous caves where the drowned abide,
Is the coast-connecting wire.

Of all achievements that have been,
The cable-message wrought
The greatest victory for men
When weeks were clipped to seconds in
The passage of a thought.

And then the dreaded war-machine
That habits with the sharks
Plies its course the coasts between:
And the transatlantic submarine
A new achievement marks.

New goals the questing mind attains
But the quest is never done;
To-day above the ocean lanes
Like sea-birds race the aeroplanes
In a wingèd Marathon.

We cannot know in our wisdom's dearth
The things that are yet to be,—
But, to whatever wonders the future gives birth,
To-day down the ocean-filled hollows of earth
Comes the cry of a conquered sea.

And so through the years we cannot behold,
Through the centuries yet to run,
Man's mind shall accomplish, his dreams shall
unfold,—
And to distant descendants the story be told
Of victories yet to be won.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

Will-o'-the-wisp, thy winding way!
Take it, thou elf of deceitful day!
For why not believe that night is morn?
Why not believe thee a star of light
Come down to earth to guide us aright?
If life has proved bare,
If its kingdom is care,
And the sun has gone down on the fruitful and fair,
O why not believe that night is morn?
O why not be sure
In thy fanciful lure
That the thistle's a rose—instead of a thorn!

Will-o'-the-wisp! Will-o'-the-wisp!
Down through the ages of fog and of mist
Thy fairy lights glimmer,
Now brighter, now dimmer,
And over men's souls thou has cast a faint shimmer
Of roseate light
That has tricked them to thinking
That help is at hand when they know they are sinking—
And that night is star-bright
When it's leaden!
O, the ears that re-list
And the fires that re-redden

As thy light is shot down through the ages of mist!
O the empty star-dust left on the lips that thou hast
kissed!

But why not pursue, though never attain?
Why calmly abide in the deserts of life
And in deserts forever remain?
O will-o'-the-wisp, thy winding way!
Take it, thou elf of deceitful day!
For what can enliven the hope to attain,
Rekindle the fire
. . . Inspire the desire
. To reach to a higher
And lovelier plane,
But the roseate light of beauty uncaught
And the romance glamor of battles unfought—
But the thought that there's something to gain
At the crest of the next high hill?

So why not invite
The night-light bright ,
Though the gleam be false that it lends,
And climb to a height
With roses dight
Though they fade at the touch of the winds?
O will-o'-the-wisp, lead on at thy will,
Thou elf of deceitful day!
Lead on and lead on,
Though thou come to no dawn
And the darkness pales never to gray;

Lead on and make bright
The path of our night
And play us the pranks you may,
For men will at sight
Follow visions of light—
Though it be by a winding way!

HOUSE-AWAKENING

(On taking an early morning walk through the residence streets of a city and watching the houses respond to the growing and gradual brightness of a new day.)

The city street is a streak of dawn,
A stream of melting light
Dissolving into silver-gray
The sediment of night.

The houses on their terrace-beds
Drowse in dreaming rows
And greet the morn with heavy eyes
Curtained in repose.

They rouse to life at sound of feet
Breaking the restful dawn;
And lazily each porch-mouthed house
Wakes with a sleepy yawn.

They doff their gray night-caps of fog
(That evening mist has spun)
And bathe their faces dripping-bright
In the rain of level sun.

A DOWNTOWN ALLEY

This dingy, high-walled alley,
This gorge-like sunken valley,
 Down which at noontime only steals the sun,
Is not a thing of beauty:
It is shadowy and sooty
 And is rather commonplace, as alleys run.

Always straight and long and smoky,
Through an atmosphere that's choky,
 Like the grimy path of sloth the alley crawls,—
Through lengths of tangled wiring
And refuse uninspiring,
 Till into one the distance blends its walls.

But I work and watch above it
And I learn to know and love it,
 For I like its back-door type of honesty;
And I have a kind of feeling
That the alley is revealing
 What eyes, unglassed, prose-focused, may not see.

Here I gain the city's greeting;
Here I sense its true heart-beating
 As I watch each intersecting avenue:

I can see the traffic going,
Feel the rhythm of its flowing,
Where a dozen channels cross my walled-in view.

Vivisectionists seraphic,
As they sought the heart of traffic,
Have cut with sharp, thin blade, keen-edged as air,
And this muscle-deep incision
To their secret-seeking vision
Has a dozen throbbing arteries laid bare.

No, it's not a thing of beauty;
It is shadowy and sooty,
And it's just as commonplace as it can be;
But I've worked and watched above it
Till I've learned to know and love it,
For I like its back-door type of honesty.

THE STREET CAR

Every night
I watch the street-car
Out of sight,
As it crawls along
Like a worm of light
And grumbles its song
To the curbstones white;
And the trolley spar
Like a floating star
Or meteor bright
Dangles above its noisy flight.

Moments fleet
Dreamily by;
Drowsily sweet
The minutes fly,
While quietly I
With half-closed eye
Watch the car
Go up the street;
And I hear its rattling pulses beat,
Till the whirring song
Of the motors strong
Begins to die
In the distance far.

Then I watch the mouth of a chimney nigh
Towering high
Against the sky
As it gapes for a smoky star.

THE CITY COSMIC

This morning
The lure of the street
Entangled my feet
And I walked . . . and walked . . . and walked . . .

I turned into the narrowest streets, I breathed the
 smoke of the factories, I smelled the reek and
 rot of the tenements;
I passed by ancient spacious lawns and piles of masonry
 century-old, the pride of the city fathers;
I walked through parks and down the singing boulevards. . . .
And I discovered what a cosmic thing a city is.

Dirt. . . .
Congestion. . . .
A heap of rubbish. . . .

Blocks and stones and buildings;
White granitoid, smoked gray, like second-day collars
 of respectability;
Whistle-topped, grim-eyed factories;
The air, heavy with the aroma of coal-tar gas and
 the packing-house;
A network of wires and rails;
Bill-boards, the sign of the dollar;

Squares of artificial landscape called parks and gardens;
A sea of roofs and chimneys. . . .

Houses . . . and houses . . . and houses. . . .

Time's driftwood packed together by the force of
the tide!

And that is the city:

A huge mass of Material,

Looped and bound by the oily-black ribbon of the
boulevards green-selvaged in the spring.

The people

Are not the city.

They infest the city, as rats and roaches the drift-
wood left high on the bank,—

Or they build the city, as a beaver builds its dam, bit
by bit.

Yet, the people and the city are very much alike.

They are like two mirrors, each reflecting the other,

For those who do not make the city are made by the
city.

At dusk

The smoky-bright,

Soft-calling night

Led me again through streets . . . and streets . . .
and streets. . . .

I mingled with late-shopping crowds, I rubbed against
the clay-crustéd garments of laborers, I watched
the rush for clinging-space on a Main Street car;

I heard the drone of the beggar in the doorway with his pencils and shoestrings, I met women in brilliant coats—with painted cheeks ghost-white, I caught the innocent laugh of whirling youth from a flashing car;

I noted the unblinking eyes of the hypnotized throng of cinema-worshippers pouring in and out past the shrieking posters flaming red and yellow;

I listened to the incessant colloquy of the city's victims and creators rising like the shrill hum of a steel-cutting wheel;

I passed into the quieter and poorer streets and saw the ill-clad mothers of children, born and unborn, taking the early spring air of a front doorstep overlooking the pavement, and as I passed they looked at me with eyes unfearing and curious;

I glimpsed half-way down a dim deserted street a figure that slunk, thief-like, into the mouth of an alley;

I walked upon the boulevard and saw through the windows of the rich the luxury of wealth;

I turned into the park—and there was love, twin-souled, ecstatic, gripping with twining fingers the edge of Passion;

And I sat upon a smooth-worn bench and gazed with
new understanding at the evening star. . . .
And I thought what a cosmic thing the population of
a city is.

Souls. . . .

Souls that harbor ignorance and are cramped in the
cage their ignorance has built;

Helpless souls,

That sit on doorsteps and breathe the smell of refuse;

Dust-dwelling souls,

Whose wings have atrophied;

Striving, struggling, suffering souls,

Toiling in the net;

Strong, soaring souls,

That seek the sunlight in the open;

Souls that murmur, and tired-eyed souls that are
mute;

Souls of youth, wild-flowered, tossing their wind-
tangled hair!

And that is the population of a city:

Souls. . . . souls. . . .

House-huddled souls. . . .

Bound to the earth by soiled pink ropes of clay. . . .

Bound by earth to earth

Bound. . . . bound. . . .

NIGHT-LESSONS

I felt the handkerchief of Night—
Whose name was Need—
Bound, pain-tight, across my eyes.
And its ends were wrought into such a knot as only
 circumstances can tie.
And my fingers became nailless with the unceasing
 efforts to pluck off that blinding bandage of need.
But in due time the night passed, the morning came :
And I had learned to *work*.

I heard the voluptuous night-sounds, the sounds of
 silence from the throat of darkness;
I heard the harmony of stars;
And through the Night—
Whose name was Sorrow—
Stole softly the music of moonlight,
The million-voiced melody of the heart:
And I had learned to *sing*.

Bare-bosomed Night—
Whose name was Beauty—
Her unloosed tresses caught in a tiara of stars,
Stretched out her naked arms and smiled. . . .
Potent with revelation . . .
. . . The Morning Star raced up the road of dawn,
But I had learned to *love*.

And when Night had taught me *work* and *song* and
love,

Behold! I found myself, like a fixed and glowing star,
in the heart of another Night—

Whose name was Life—

For I had learned to *live*!

THE RACE PHANTOM

Earth was sleeping under the silver-knotted coverlid
of night stretched upon the Wyoming mountain-
tops,

When a silvery-shadowy phantom clothed in the
breath of the stars

Stalked to the quiet lakeside

And, with arms outstretched like message-carrying
cables toward the West,

Said:

“Yonder . . . yonder have they gone;

But where does that west-path lead?”

The pines inclined their heads, and the stars stooped
down for the answer;

The smooth lake panted in listening silence.

Then, with head flung back, the phantom lips breathed
forth three sighs:

“Into the Sunset!

Into the Night!

Into Death!”

The waves rolled up and kissed the phantom's feet;
The mountains with their breezes touched his brow;
And Nature nodded a salute of welcome to the Ghost
of the Aboriginal American.

Then in the east loomed the blue shadow of dawn,
Pouring a fusillade of fire against the mountain tops;

And with back-turned face the phantom fled
Into the West . . .
. . . Into the Night . . .
. Out of sight.

A ghost—the trembling ghost of a vanquished nation
Fleeing in terror before the irresistible approach of its
 enemy,
The Fires of the East,
The Light
Of Civilization!

POLYPHEMUS

Under the distant bridge that splices the horizon,
Suddenly burns an eye of light:
Over it rises a purple veil that blends into the coloring
 mists of morning:
And the train slides slowly down the grade like a
 black, jewel-headed pencil erasing before it the
 stains of night.

Then over the fulcrum-top of an eastern hill
The Day pushes his fire-tipped lever
To pry up the vale-clinging shadows that lie low-
 bedded against the earth;
And then,
Ulysses-like,
He sears with his flaming spike
The glaring Polyphemus-eye to a smoky blackness.

With a scream of pain the train comes on,
And groans to a sudden stop—
A blind Cyclops of traffic clinging to the guiding rails.

TROPHAEA LUNA

Green-and-blue
And gorgeous-winged,
It came to me—
Out of a May night's spring-bright gloom,
Out of the twilight into my room,
A wonder new!
And as if in quest
Of mind-mined lore-gems bright,
This wingèd drop of color-light
Planned to a rest
On a page smooth-white
And shadowed the lines I read.

Out of the night gloom's
Twilight gray,
Like a delicate wing-petaled bloom
Of May,
To me it came.
And I said, "I must know the name
Of this wonder new,
Of this green-and-blue and beautiful thing,
Of this color-flame
With the gorgeous wing."

So I built a paper prison-house
About my night-sent guest,

And it bruised its wings against the walls
As I carried it down to the science halls
In quest
Of the Man Who Knew.

And he replied:

"Trophaea luna! Look,

Here are its picture and name in a book."

But I saw not the book with its pictures and things:

I saw my moth with its ragged wings.

"But it is—it is dead!"

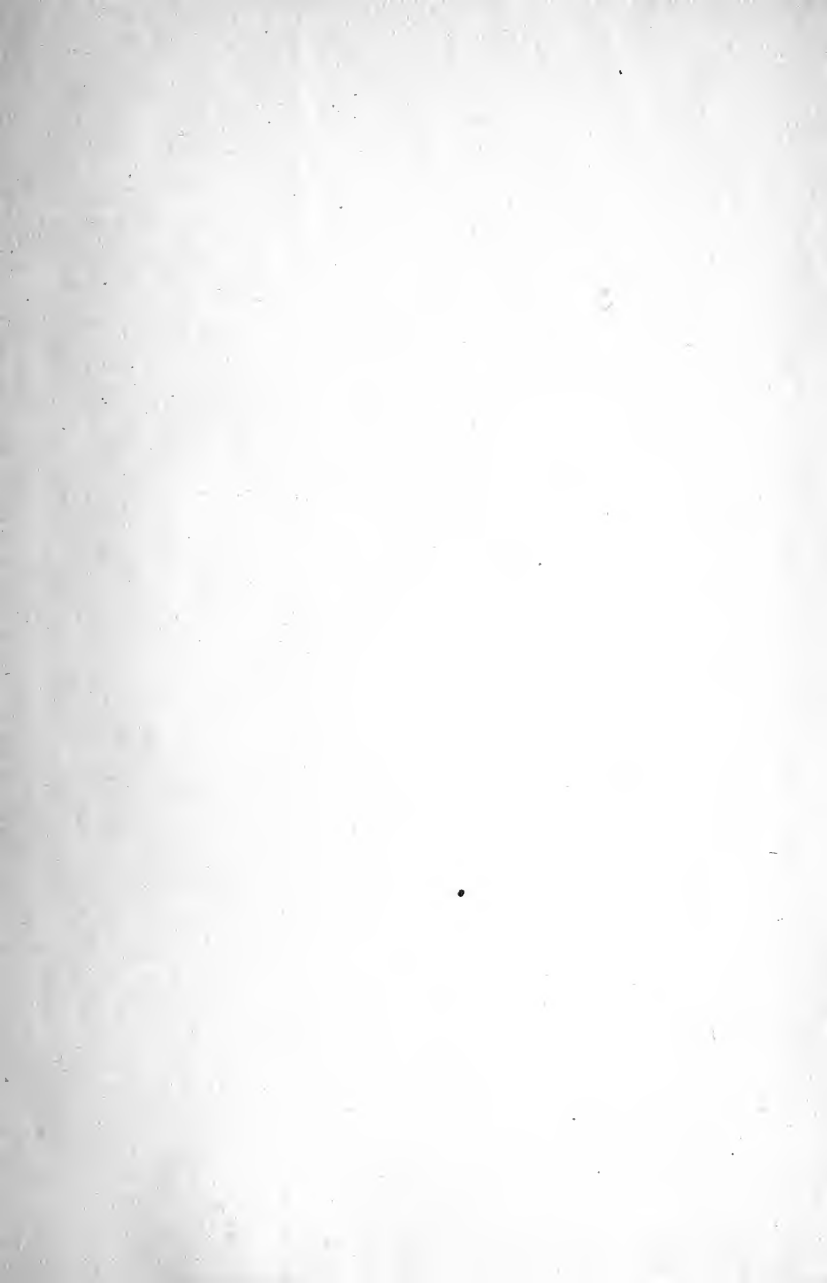
I cried.

"Yes," he said,

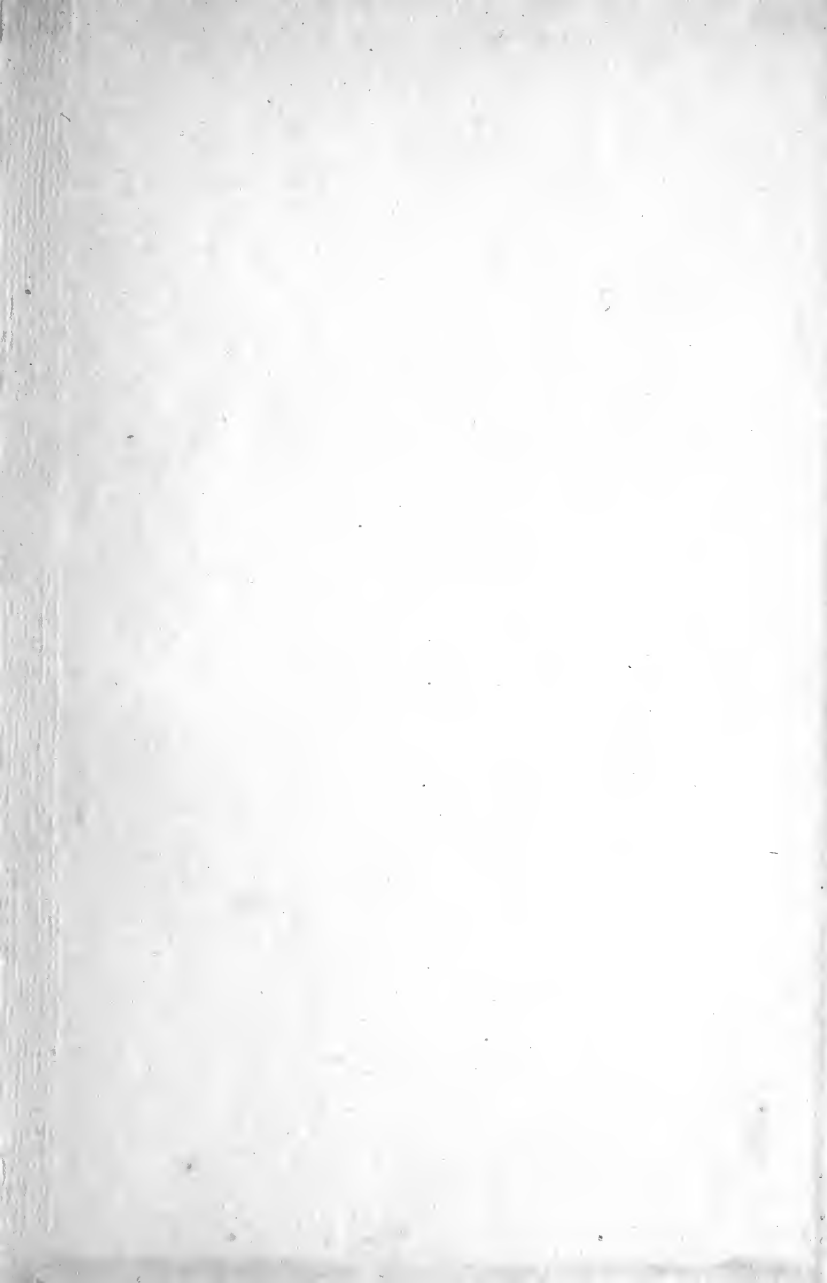
"It is Beauty—which you wanted classified."











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